

February's Spice is: Cardamom

Plant:

Elettaria cardamomum is a perennial in the ginger family that grows wild in southern India and Sri Lanka. Today cardamom is cultivated in tropical countries with Guatemala as the lead producer. The racemes bearing seed pods grow from the base of the plant and trail on the ground. Seed pods are harvested, washed then dried either in the sun or in ovens. They quickly begin to lose their eucalyptus flavor after removing them from their husks and even more so when ground. Cardamom is the third most expensive spice after saffron and Vanilla.

History:

Cardamom is popular in dishes around the globe. Black cardamom is popular in Ethiopian and Eritrean dishes where the smoky camphorous flavor gives rice dishes a needed boost. Green cardamom is the most popular. It contains cineol and limonene that give it its signature camphor and citrus flavor. White cardamom, popular in Scandinavia, is simply green cardamom that has been bleached either with peroxide or by the sun. This bleaching gives white cardamom a more mild flavor profile.

Cardamom seeds were chewed to cover bad breath and were used by Wrigley in their first chewing gum recipes. Today 60% of all cardamom produced goes to Arab nations where it is a major component of Bedouin coffee, gahwa.